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Review-essay: A New History for Martin's Una cosa rara

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A New History for Martín's *Una cosa rara*

Vincente Martín y Soler,
Una cosa rara, ossia Bellezza ed onestà: dramma giocoso.

Libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte. Edited by Gerhard Allroggen. Die Oper, vol. 5. Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1990. xiii, 462 pp.

Vicente Martín i Soler,
Una cosa rara ossia Bellezza ed onestà.

Libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte. Maria Angeles Peters, Montserrat Figueras, Gloria Fabuel, Ernesto Palacio, Inaki Fresán, Fernando Belaza-Leoz, Stefano Palatchi, Francesc Garrigosa; La Capella Reial de Catalunya and Le Concert des Nations, directed by Jordi Savall. Astrée/Auvidis E8760 (3 CDs), 1991.

JOHN PLATOFF

Martín's opera, Mozart's career

On 17 November 1786, audiences at the Burgtheater in Vienna witnessed the first performance of what would soon become an extraordinary hit—perhaps the most beloved opera of its decade. The work in question is *Una cosa rara ossia Bellezza ed Onestà,* an opera buffa with a libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte (after a Spanish play by Luis Vélez de Guevara) and music by the Spanish composer

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Vicente Martín y Soler. But to modern scholars this event, and the work's enormous popularity with audiences all over Europe, are facts primarily not of Martín y Soler's life and career, nor Da Ponte's, but of Mozart's. "[Martín's] opera *Una cosa rara* was the piece that eclipsed *Le nozze di Figaro* in the Vienna of 1786," according to Andrew Steptoe.[1] Philip G. Downs puts it in almost precisely the same terms: the opera "displaced *Figaro* and became the rage with Viennese audiences."[2]

Una cosa rara was indeed a remarkable success, though the direct correlation of its fate with that of *Figaro* is less clear, as we shall see. But how striking it is that an opera widely viewed in its own time as a masterpiece exists today, as an object of scrutiny, solely as a foil for another opera by another composer.[3] *Una cosa rara* is for us in the late twentieth century "a work that has no history," to borrow the formulation of Philip Gossett in a recent article about Rossini's Neapolitan operas. Like those operas, *Una cosa rara* had until recently "fallen out of the repertory in a way that seemed definitive . . . [it is an opera] with little or no history and critical tradition."[4] The early history of the work is forgotten; since about 1825 it has not existed as an independent work of art that merits critical attention, merely as a "fact" in a different historical account, one dealing with *Figaro* and Mozart's operatic career.

This should not be surprising. As Gossett points out, there is an accepted range of approaches to individual works, from the detailed critical examination of a work in isolation (usually an acknowledged masterpiece) to "the other extreme, [in which] the work is meaningful not in itself but only in its social and cultural interactions with historical events or, indeed, with other works."[5] The latter approach is one we recognize in many discussions of works by *kleinmeister,* or of lesser works by great composers. And, for example, the one-paragraph discussion of *Una cosa rara* in Downs's book makes its intent explicit in the first sentence: "By setting *Una cosa rara* beside *Le nozze di Figaro* we can see something of Viennese taste in the 1780s and discover why

[1] Andrew Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas* (Oxford, 1988), p. 38.

[2] Philip G. Downs, *Classical Music: The Era of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York and London, 1992), p. 530.

[3] The other way in which *Una cosa rara* functions today, of course, is as a source for one of the tunes borrowed by Mozart in the following year for the dinner-music in the Act II finale of *Don Giovanni.* This connection is discussed below.

[4] Philip Gossett, "History and Works That Have No History: Reviving Rossini's Neapolitan Operas," *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons,* ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago and London, 1992), pp. 97–98. The absence of a "history" is even more true for the Rossini works, which were for the most part failures when first produced.

[5] Ibid., p. 96.

Mozart's music was found difficult to accept."[6] Such a contextual approach to *Una cosa rara* is both appropriate and valuable. The operatic composer of the 1780s who most interests us is Mozart, and a study of Martín's opera (along with other operatic works from this decade) sheds new light both on the context for Mozart's operas and on the operas themselves.

Moreover, there is an additional question of significance to be answered: How can the respective fall and rise of *Una cosa rara* and *Le nozze di Figaro* be interpreted? What does the total disappearance of *Una cosa rara* from operatic stages, along with the commonplace acceptance of *Le nozze di Figaro* as one of opera's greatest masterpieces, tell us about the differences between today's listeners and the operatic audiences of two centuries ago?

Both these matters—the musical context in which Mozart wrote, and the changes in aesthetic outlook among audiences—are just beginning to be explored in depth (especially the latter). And the appearance of a handsome "critical" edition of Martín's opera, along with a complete recording of the work, thus comes at an ideal time for it to be valuable to scholars. But if the contextual approach is really to help us further, we need to know more about *Una cosa rara;* for a while, at least, we must take the work seriously for itself. Only in this way can our understanding of it become detailed enough to offer real insights on its relationship to Mozart's own operatic writing. And as has been the case in many other studies of works by *Kleinmeister,* focusing on *Una cosa rara* provides its own rewards—the opera contains some strikingly beautiful music.

Una cosa rara in Vienna

The story of *Una cosa rara's* creation makes interesting reading, no doubt in part because our chief source is its librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, who was capable of enlivening the dullest tale.[7] Da Ponte had already written the libretto for Martín's first Viennese opera buffa: *Il burbero di buon cuore,* an adaptation of Goldoni's French play *Le bourru bienfaisant,* was first performed in January 1786 and achieved a moderate success. For their second collaboration Da Ponte chose a Spanish subject as a compliment to Martín's patron:

[6] Downs, *Classical Music,* p. 531.

[7] Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Memorie,* ed. Giovanni Gambarin and Fausto Nicolini (Bari, 1918), 2 vols., I, 124–29; in English as *Memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte,* trans. Elisabeth Abbott, ed. Arthur Livingston (Philadelphia, 1929), pp. 166–72. Excerpts of this section are also translated in Sheila Hodges, *Lorenzo Da Ponte: The Life and Times of Mozart's Librettist* (London, 1985), pp. 75–78.

Isabel, Marquesa de Llano, the wife of the Spanish Ambassador in Vienna. Da Ponte kept secret the fact that he had written the libretto—indeed, the author is identified in the Viennese libretto of 1786 as "N. N. P. Ar."—and, he tells us, took great pleasure after the successful première in discomfiting critics who praised the work while telling him that he should learn from it how to write an opera libretto! The rehearsal period was marked by numerous intrigues, in which (says Da Ponte) the singers all complained about their music, so much so that the Emperor himself had to intervene by quoting to them a couplet from the Act I finale: "Ma quel ch'è fatto, è fatto,/E non si può cangiar." ("But what is done, is done,/And cannot be undone.") On opening night "the theatre was full, most of the audience being composed of enemies ready to hiss. However, right from the beginning of the performance they found such grace, sweetness and melody in the music, and such novelty and interest in the words, that they seemed to be overcome by an ecstasy of pleasure. A silence, a degree of attention never before accorded to an Italian opera, was followed by a storm of applause and exclamations of delight and pleasure. Everyone understood the intrigues of the cabal, and with one accord clapped and praised."[8] The opera was thus an instant and overwhelming success, for its text as much as for its music (or at least so Da Ponte would have us believe). The Spanish costumes, which according to Count Zinzendorf were provided and paid for by the Marquesa,[9] became the source of a new fashion craze: "ladies even did their hair and dressed 'à la Cosa Rara'."[10]

Not only Da Ponte's memoirs, written nearly forty years later, but the historical record testifies to the rapturous approval with which *Una cosa rara* was received; but it does not do so without one or two intriguing gaps. Johann Pezzl wrote from Vienna in 1787 that "because its run was brought to an end by the arrival of Lent, [*Una cosa rara* was performed] only some fifteen times. But this was the piece that virtually took the town by storm; at every performance 300 to 400 people had to be turned away from the doors. . . ."[11] Actually, the detailed "Spielplan" for the Burgtheater compiled by Otto Michtner lists only nine performances in the three months between the opera's première in November 1786 and the closing of the theater for Lent

[8] Quoted from Hodges, *Lorenzo Da Ponte,* p. 76.

[9] From Zinzendorf's diary, 17 November 1786; quoted in Otto Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater als Opernbühne: von der Einführung des deutschen Singspiels (1778) bis zum Tod Kaiser Leopolds II (1792)* (Vienna, 1970), p. 405 n. 66.

[10] April Fitzlyon, *Lorenzo Da Ponte: A Biography of Mozart's Librettist* (London, 1955 [as *The Libertine Librettist*]; reprint ed., London, 1982), p. 134.

[11] Johann Pezzl, *Skizze von Wien* (1786–90), translated by H. C. Robbins Landon in his *Mozart and Vienna* (New York, 1991), p. 137.

the following February. (This is nearly one-fourth of the total of thirty-eight operatic performances in that period.) More interesting still is the fact that when the Burgtheater reopened for the 1787–88 season in April, *Una cosa rara* was not in the repertory, as one would have expected for such a popular work; it did not return until August 20. At that point, however, it had fourteen performances in five months.[12] Thereafter *Una cosa rara* was performed in each of the next four seasons, and it continued to draw good crowds. Dexter Edge's important recent study of box-office receipts at the Burgtheater for the 1789–90 and 1790–91 seasons reveals that *Una cosa rara* was in each season the sixth-most popular opera (of fourteen and fifteen works respectively), while competing both with other popular long-running works and newly-produced operas in each season.[13] In 1794 the Wiener Theater Almanach was still reporting that the public could not get enough of the opera.[14] Already by 1787 *Una cosa rara* was advertised as being for sale in a German edition (*Die Seltenheit oder Schönheit und Tugend*); and the opera was produced at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt in a German translation by Ferdinand Eberl.[15] Artaria published a piano-vocal score of *Una cosa rara* in two parts, on 16 December 1786 and 21 February 1787; the first part thus appeared within a month of the première.[16] By 1790 there was even a "sequel": a work by Emanuel Schikaneder and Benedikt Schack (the former the author of the *Zauberflöte* libretto and its first Papageno, the latter the opera's first Tamino) entitled *Der Fall ist noch weit seltener*.[17]

The only mystery is the early performance history of the work itself. Why just nine performances in the first season, if it was turning away crowds at each one? And why was *Una cosa rara* off the boards for the first four months of the 1787 season? The answer to the first question is that a rate of nine performances in three months was

[12] Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater,* pp. 488–94.

[13] Dexter Edge, "Mozart's Reception in Vienna, 1787–1791," paper presented at the Mozart Bicentenary Conference of the Royal Musical Association, London, August 1991, see especially Table 5. A volume of the papers presented at the conference is in press; my thanks to Mr. Edge for generously sharing with me a copy of his paper in advance of publication. His data for these seasons also demonstrate the dangers of relying on the number of performances alone in judging the popularity of a work: certain operas that drew badly were still performed often, while others drew well and had only three performances (pp. 19–20). Unfortunately the box-office receipts for seasons earlier in the 1780s seem not to have survived. We would do well, however, to proceed cautiously in making a direct link between the number of performances of an opera and its popularity, in the absence of other evidence.

[14] Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater,* p. 222.

[15] Ibid., p. 405 n. 71.

[16] Dorothea Eva Link, "The Da Ponte Operas of Vicente Martín y Soler" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1991), p. 72.

[17] Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater,* p. 223.

typical, even for a successful opera. In the mid-1780s the Burgtheater company had an extensive repertory, performing between fifteen and twenty different works each season. Even a work meeting with general approval had to be alternated with a number of other operas.[18]

The second question may perhaps be answered by observing that the female star of the Italian troupe in Vienna, Nancy Storace, left to return to England early in 1787 (probably soon after her farewell benefit concert on 23 February). She had sung the role of Lilla, the romantic heroine in Martín's opera (as well as a character similar to Lilla in many ways, the Susanna in *Figaro*). Quite possibly the return of *Una cosa rara* to the repertory was delayed until Storace's replacement, Anna Morichelli-Boselli,[19] could learn the role, one of as many as a dozen she would have sung during her first Viennese season.

Did *Una cosa rara* "displace" *Le nozze di Figaro,* as is commonly claimed today?[20] *Figaro*'s own 1786 performance record would seem to contradict such an interpretation. After its first four performances, in May 1786, *Figaro* was played only sporadically: once each in July, August, September, November and December. (Thereafter it was not heard again at the Burgtheater until 1789.) Only the last of these nine performances took place after *Una cosa rara* opened. The verdict of the Viennese audience on *Le nozze di Figaro* seems to have been delivered well before *Una cosa rara* developed its wildly enthusiastic following.

Story and libretto

The simple story of *Una cosa rara* fits squarely in the tradition of typical comic opera plots. The "rare thing" of the title is the heroine Lilla, who is both beautiful and faithful. She lives in a Spanish mountain village that is visited by Queen Isabella, along with her son the Prince and their courtier Corrado. Lilla remains true to her Lubino, a fellow villager, both before and after their marriage. With the assistance of the sympathetic Queen, who admires the peacefulness and simplicity of rural life, she resists the repeated importunings, bribes, and amorous serenades not only of the Prince but of Corrado as well. Another village couple, Tita (Lilla's brother) and

[18] By comparison, Da Ponte and Martín's hugely successful *L'arbore di Diana* had 10 performances in the three months after its première (1 October 1787); Palomba and Guglielmi's *L'inganno amoroso* also had 10 performances between April and June 1787. Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater,* pp. 490–94.

[19] Ibid., p. 229.

[20] Allroggen's foreword to the new Henle edition repeats this claim as well, on p.viii.

Ghita—both *parti buffe*—entertain comically with their arguments and reconciliations. The Queen and the Prince are *seria* roles, even though the latter behaves at times in a less-than-noble fashion. The Mayor, to whom Tita initially tries to marry Lilla, is a subsidiary *buffa* figure.

The characters in *Una cosa rara* exemplify in relatively uncomplicated ways the familiar types that populate Italian comic opera of the period. At the center stand Lilla and Lubino, the sympathetic pair of lovers whose happy union the audience may confidently anticipate. As is often the case he is also a comic figure, at times something of a buffoon; she represents what Mary Hunter has called the "sentimental heroine": the woman at the heart of an opera's romantic intrigue, who is loved or desired by several of the men in the story, and frequently the object of resentment or jealousy from the other women. While not noble she is deeply sympathetic, largely if not totally passive, and given to expressing her inner feelings (as most other characters are not).[21] On the *buffa* side of this couple are Ghita and Tita, whose slapstick displays of anger also express the cynical views of romance and of the opposite sex that typify secondary *buffa* characters. Queen Isabella and her son the Prince represent the standard *seria* characters; and the latter's socially inappropriate pursuit of Lilla, the main conflict in the plot, resembles in many ways Count Almaviva's pursuit of Susanna in *Figaro*.

Connections to *Figaro* might have been suggested to Martín's audience in another way as well: by the fact that several of the same singers appeared in both operas, generally in equivalent roles. As already noted, Lilla and Susanna were both sung by Nancy Storace, the leading female singer of the company and, along with the baritone Francesco Benucci, one of the two most popular singers in Vienna. Benucci, who was Mozart's Figaro, played not Lubino but the more comic role of Tita, while Stefano Mandini (Count Almaviva) sang Lubino—presumably because of the more lyric quality of much of Lubino's music.[22] The two *seria* roles of Mozart's Countess and Martín's Queen Isabella, not surprisingly, were both sung by the same soprano, Luisa Laschi-Mombelli; Michael Kelly (Basilio/Don Curzio) sang Corrado, another comic tenor role; and the Ghita was Dorotea Bussani, who had sung Cherubino. The Prince was played by Vincenzo Calvesi, who commonly sang lyric or *seria* tenor roles (including, later, Mozart's Ferrando).

[21] Mary Hunter, "The Fusion and Juxtaposition of Genres in Opera Buffa 1770–1800: Anelli and Piccinni's 'Griselda' ", *Music and Letters* LXVII (1986), 376.

[22] Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," pp. 38–39. For a discussion of the style of buffa arias written for Benucci see John Platoff, "The buffa aria in Mozart's Vienna," *Cambridge Opera Journal* II, 99–120.

In some ways the story of *Una cosa rara* may be read as a more conventional version of the same common opera buffa plot that *Figaro* presents in a more challenging fashion. The most frequently-used plot archetype in this repertory is that of the couple whose plans for marriage are opposed by an outside force: usually a rival suitor or the father of the would-be bride, who wishes her to marry someone else. The rival may be inappropriate for reasons of social class, of age, or simply because he is not the one the heroine loves. Well-known examples include *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (both Paisiello's and Rossini's) and Cimarosa and Bertati's *Il matrimonio segreto*.[23] What is unusual, and threatening to the social status quo, in *Figaro* (especially Beaumarchais's original play) is the degree to which Figaro challenges the social hierarchy, both verbally and by trying actively to outwit the Count, his social superior. He is joined by Susanna, who is no passive object but plays a role at least as effective as Figaro in arranging matters to their liking.

In *Una cosa rara* the foiling of the Prince's repeated attempts upon Lilla's virtue depends almost entirely on the Queen. Lilla acts herself only to appeal to the Queen for protection, which the latter provides at several points in the story. As for Lubino, he attempts to deal with the Mayor by bluster and violence, only to be arrested and tied up; but he never challenges his more important rival, the Prince. In fact, Lubino never realizes that the Prince is trying to seduce his Lilla, though it is quite clear to the audience. Even in the Act II septet, a scene of confusion and mistaken identities in the dark following the Prince's serenading of Lilla, Lubino falls humbly to the ground when he recognizes the Prince. In short, *Una cosa rara* conforms to social norms in just the two areas where *Figaro* challenged them: the superiority of Princes and Queens to common people is repeatedly acknowledged by everyone, and the difficulties of peasants are solved not by their own efforts but by the gracious intercession of their betters. At the end, in fact, the Prince even avoids revealing to his mother that he was the would-be seducer: when a bag of gold is found, making clear that someone has been trying to bribe Lilla for her favors, the Prince whispers "Don't reveal me" to Corrado, who while also guilty promptly takes the fall for both the Prince and himself. He is stripped of his rank and banished by the outraged Queen, while the Prince expresses his regrets but stands aside without intervening.

[23] Other examples include *Il finto cieco* (Gazzaniga and Da Ponte), *Fra i due litiganti* (Sarti and an unknown librettist [after Goldoni's *Le nozze*]), and *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* (Paisiello and Casti).

Just as strong as the confirmation of traditional social hierarchy is the ethos of the pastoral: set in a mountain village populated by naive but good-hearted citizens, *Una cosa rara* illustrates the late-eighteenth century fondness for the idealized country life. This theme is by no means merely implicit; it is brought out several times by Queen Isabella, as in Act II Scene 6: "Who would have said that under these rough roofs, and among the poverty of these shepherds, is harbored so much virtue and honesty? Oh happy homes, oh friendly land, you are the real home of peace and repose. With what pleasure I breathe your air. . . ." And the pastoral theme is well-suited to the gentle and lyrical melodic style of Martín, much of whose music in the opera moves in a moderate $\frac{6}{8}$. Dorothea Link even makes the very plausible suggestion that Da Ponte and Martín, jointly recognizing the appropriateness of the pastoral for Martín's musical style, emphasized it more and more in their three collaborations.[24] While there is relatively little of the pastoral in *Il burbero di buon cuore,* there is far more in *Una cosa rara* and still more in their final Viennese opera buffa together, *L'arbore di Diana* (1787).

Da Ponte's libretto for *Una cosa rara* is an excellent piece of work, one of which he was justifiably proud. It does not match the delicious complexity of incident that is the hallmark of *Figaro,* because Vélez's play does not offer the same possibilities to a librettist as did Beaumarchais's *Le mariage de Figaro.* But one finds the same ironic wit, the same elegance of language, and the same care to assure that peasants speak in quite different words than Queens and Princes. The structure is also like that of Da Ponte's librettos for Mozart, with extended finales to end each of the two acts, a judicious mixture of arias and ensembles,[25] and care to provide at least one large ensemble towards the middle of the second act. (Compare the sextets in Act III of *Figaro* and Act II of *Don Giovanni.*) One also recognizes without difficulty some of the standard opera buffa clichés: an extended scene of mistaken identities in the dark, for example (in Martín's Act II septet), or the surprising appearance of a character out of a closet. Da Ponte manages to make something unusual out of the latter device both in *Figaro* and in *Una cosa rara:* in *Figaro* the twist is that the Countess, the beneficiary of Susanna's trick, is as surprised as its intended victim, the Count. In Martín's opera Lilla's emergence from the closet, which

[24] Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," pp. 199–200.

[25] Edward J. Dent, *Mozart's Operas: A Critical Study* (1913; 2nd ed., London, 1947), pp. 108–09, made a big point of the great preponderance of arias to ensembles in *Una cosa rara,* as opposed to the 14 of each type of piece in *Figaro.* But in fact the 12 ensembles in *Una cosa rara* (there are 17 arias) is still quite a substantial number.

suggests that she had been improperly alone with the Prince, is followed to everyone's even greater surprise by the subsequent appearance from the same closet of her "chaperone," Corrado, thus proving her innocence.

Writers have generally asserted that Da Ponte's non-Mozartian librettos are not up to the level of the Mozartian ones. Sheila Hodges, who grants that the *Una cosa rara* libretto "is both gay and touching, with some charming arias," nonetheless finds it lacking in "the depths of character-drawing, refinement and poetry which Da Ponte achieved in his operas for Mozart."[26] But I find this view a bit simplistic. The richness of characterization in *Figaro,* for example, stems to a great degree from the expressive qualities of the music. We know Susanna, the Countess, and the rest from their musical incarnations, not merely from reading their words. Moreover we have seen them acted and sung in the theater countless times. The non-Mozart operas for which Da Ponte wrote librettos—*Una cosa rara* and a number of other works—have no equivalent place in our memory: we have neither seen them on stage (with rare exceptions) or heard them sung. So it is nearly impossible to view the works in comparable terms, to judge *Figaro* from the text alone or to imagine *Una cosa rara* in its full musical and visual richness. Reading and listening to Martín's opera today, one does not sympathize greatly with its characters, most of whom seem a bit one-dimensional. But it is far from clear that the responsibility for this lies with Da Ponte's text.

Una cosa rara and Martín's musical style

Any discussion of the music of *Una cosa rara* must begin with melody. From the distance of two centuries, and from the perspective of Mozart's opere buffe, two stylistic characteristics of the work immediately stand out. The first is Martín's exceptional gift for lyrical melodic writing: for the most part his music offers relatively little in the way of great dramatic intensity, but it features no end of tender melodies, beautifully shaped and surrounded by skillful and discreet accompaniments. The second salient feature might be called a lack of density. I mean this in both the horizontal and vertical senses: long stretches of music in which relatively little changes, in which a tune may be repeated several times, give a sense of a relaxed pace, while simple, homophonic, and relatively unchanging textures usually offer little to distract the ear from the leading melodic voice. Martín's music seems simpler than Mozart's both because its textures

[26] Hodges, *Lorenzo Da Ponte,* p. 78.

at any given point are simpler and more consistent, and because the rate of change or frequency of incident in the music is so much lower.

A clear example is provided by the overture, with its lyrical 4+4 initial phrase leading to a half-cadence (Example 1[27]). The material in itself is not unusual, but the orchestra plays this phrase three times (twice pianissimo and a third time forte, with trumpets and drums) before moving on. At the end of the second statement the repeat of the half-cadence, rather than the full cadence that would lead to a new musical idea, is truly surprising. Moreover, after the third statement (closed by a full cadence) what follows is eight measures of other short melodic phrases; only in measure 33 does the bustling, energetic music characteristic of operatic overtures finally appear. Hearing the three-fold repetition of the beginning phrase provides an unmistakable signal to the listener of the expansiveness to come.

Indeed the same message is conveyed by the one passage from *Una cosa rara* familiar to modern audiences: the melody "Oh quanto un sì bel giubilo," quoted by Mozart in the Act II finale of *Don Giovanni*. This too is a lyrical eight-measure tune, so it is surprising to find that it is the main idea of the stretta from Martín's Act I finale, a place where musical ideas tend to be fragmentary or energetically cadential rather than lyrical. And just as in his overture, Martín begins the stretta with a triple statement of the melody before offering any contrasting material. The entire stretta section is relaxed, melodic, and cheerful rather than exciting or climactic; and the familiar melody is heard a total of seven times, occupying 56 of the section's 157 measures.[28] Here as in the overture (and in many other numbers in the opera) Martín's impulse runs to lyricism rather than dramatic intensity, and the pace of musical events is unhurried.

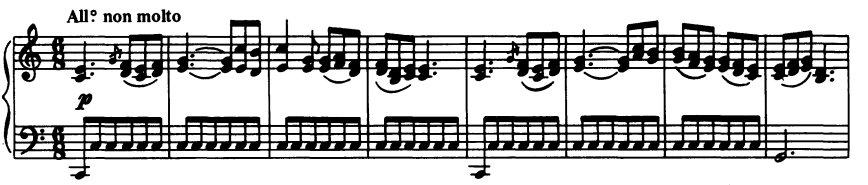
Martín's contemporaries fully appreciated his gift for lyric melody. As Link points out, commentators universally described his music with terms like "sweet," "tender," and "graceful," and in using these terms they focused above all on his melodies.[29] Of course, *Una cosa rara* and Martín's other operas contain more than just lyrical pieces. Like other opere buffe of the time, they feature numbers in

[27] This and the following examples are adapted from the piano-vocal score of the opera arranged by C. D. Stegmann and published by Simrock (Bonn, n.d.).

[28] This affect is appropriate for the situation, which is unusual in a central finale: the main conflict appears resolved, Lilla and Lubino will be permitted to marry, and everyone is happy (except the Prince and Corrado). Normally in the central finale the plot reaches a point of maximum conflict, thus justifying a lengthy and energetic stretta expressing confusion and trepidation.

[29] Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," pp. 147–48.

EXAMPLE 1. Overture, mm. 1–8.



the typical *buffa* or *seria* styles, as appropriate to particular characters. In *Una cosa rara* Ghita and Tita have an extended *buffa* duet in which the comic couple hurl insults at one another,[30] and both the Queen and the Prince have arias in a suitably elevated style (the Queen's recitative and rondò is Act II, No. 6, the Prince's recitative and aria Act II, No. 7[31]). Martín handles both *buffa* and *seria* styles with full competence, and even occasional inspiration; but the most memorable numbers of the opera are those in which the lyrical element—what Link calls the "song-style"—come to the fore. And at times Martín relies on this style even when its stylistic appropriateness for the character singing might be questioned. In the Act I introduzione the Queen first sings a brief accompanied recitative whose formal and noble-sounding orchestral flourishes announce her royal status; but following this recitative she sings an eight-measure tune in $\frac{6}{8}$, accompanied in parallel sixths or thirds above a drone bass. It is a lovely moment but hardly well-suited to the stature of a Queen, especially in her very first appearance in the opera. Clearly Martín is taking advantage of the pastoral setting, with the Queen singing to the villagers, as a sufficient justification for a musical style at which he excels. Song-style is characterized by fluid, periodic melody, by a relaxed tempo (frequently in a dance rhythm of $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$), and by a consistent texture in which the melody, doubled at the third or sixth, is

[30] This duet reflects a long-standing tradition in 18th-century opera buffa, both in its exchange of epithets ("Villanaccia!" "Assassino!" etc.) and in its comically mechanical rhythms. It is the kind of piece that everyone wrote, but no one (including Martín) did as well as Paisiello. The Martín duet is discussed further, and part of it reprinted, in John Platoff, "How original was Mozart? Evidence from *opera buffa*," *Early Music* XX (1992), 110–11.

[31] Here and below I use the numbers given in the Henle edition, which differ at times from those in the manuscript scores of the opera.

supported by a discreet harmonic bass.[32] In the Queen's brief melody the parallel thirds or sixths are constant; but in longer numbers they are used less mechanically, instead occurring from time to time to underline cadences or sweeten particular phrases.

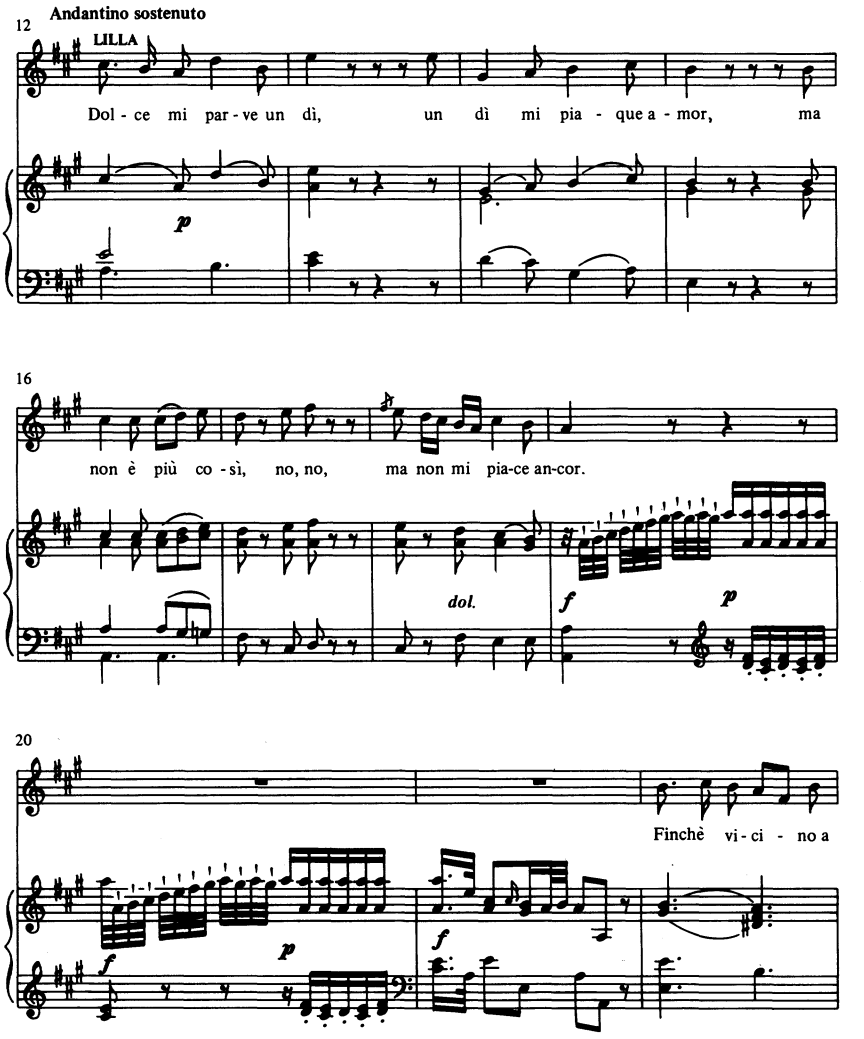
Lilla's Act I cavatina "Dolce mi parve un dì" (Act I, No. 13) illustrates the sensuous possibilities of this style (Example 2). Moreover this aria is of interest because of some superficial similarities to Susanna's "Deh vieni, non tardar" from Act IV of *Figaro*. Both pieces express amorous longings; both are sung by the "sentimental heroine" of the opera (in each case played by Nancy Storace); and both move in a moderate Andante or Andantino in $\frac{6}{8}$. But a comparison of the two pieces points up their differences: Martín's aria is simpler in many respects, and his orchestral accompaniment never matches the subtly varied textures of Mozart's. Instead the success of "Dolce mi parve un dì" rests more heavily on the singer alone.

Da Ponte's two quatrains of *settenario tronco* for Lilla are more simple and conventional than his ten lines of *endecasillabo* for Susanna, and while the latter sings in three-measure phrases Lilla's are nearly all of two measures. Moreover, because her lines are *tronchi* the phrases all close on the downbeat without an afterbeat (see Example 2, mm. 13, 15, etc.). This highlights one difference between Martín's and Mozart's arias. Mozart consistently uses the solo woodwinds of his orchestra to bridge the gaps between the end of each of Susanna's phrases and the start of the next one, filling the vocal silences with melody and sometimes actually leading from Susanna's closing pitch to the opening pitch of her next phrase (as in m. 9 of "Deh vieni"). In the first quatrain of Lilla's aria Martín leaves silences in the vocal rests, silences that because of the *tronco* lines seem quite long, threatening the forward motion of the piece. As the second quatrain begins (m. 22), however, the orchestra becomes more active, linking the vocal phrases just as Mozart does. Lilla's phrases are accompanied by parallel thirds; and then at measure 27, on the words "languir d'amor," the texture becomes richer, with interplay between the bassoons, the clarinets and the voice in faster notes, including Lilla's chromatic descents on "languir." This is a genuinely striking and sensual moment, a spot that fully lives up to the atmosphere achieved in "Deh vieni".

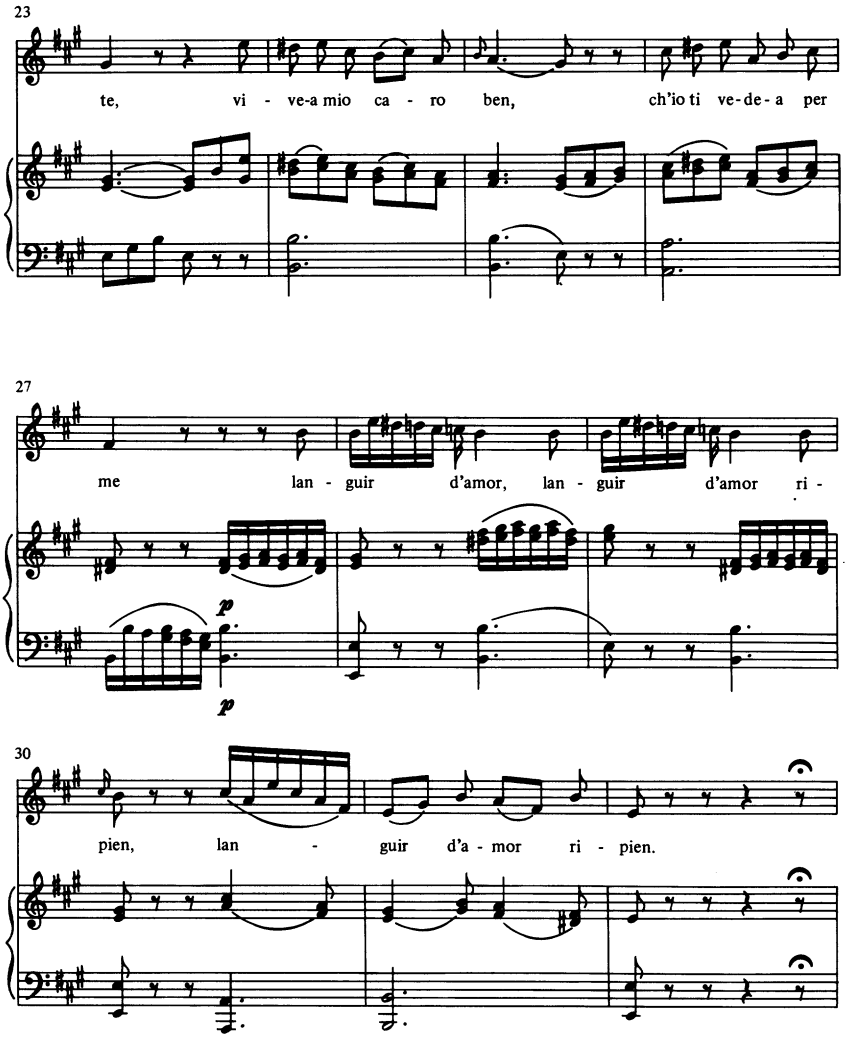
But it is only a moment. After the pause in measure 32 on a full cadence in the dominant, Martín returns to the tonic for a repetition

[32] This is largely the formulation of Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," pp. 113–18.

EXAMPLE 2. Aria, Act I No. 13, mm. 12–32.



EXAMPLE 2. *(continued)*



of the first quatrain in the tonic: Lilla's aria is revealed as an uncomplicated ABA form with a brief coda. While "Deh vieni" builds steadily towards the climactic setting of its final line ("Ti vo' la fronte incoronar di rose"), and employs a subtle variety of textures and accompanimental patterns,[33] "Dolce mi parve un dì" remains a more conventionally static aria, and one in which the orchestra emerges from its purely accompanimental role only briefly. The aria thus depends much more on its singer to create the mood: in particular to shape each two-measure phrase so beautifully that it hangs in the air, sustaining the listener through the rests until the next phrase begins. Nancy Storace must have been a marvelous singer to succeed as she did in music like this.[34]

In this aria and elsewhere, Martín seems considerably less comfortable with orchestral punctuating ideas than with vocal melody. The phrase in measures 19–21 that rounds off the first quatrain of the aria is a bit too energetic for the languorous quality of the vocal line, and the dotted rhythms in measure 21 sound particularly out of place. This point might seem too subtle to be worth mentioning, were it not for the fact that some even more maladroit examples of orchestral punctuation may be heard in other numbers.[35]

The lyricism of "Dolce mi parve un dì" is also apparent in the most passionately beloved number in the opera, the love-duet "Pace, caro mio sposo" for Lilla and Lubino in Act II (No. 15). The enthusiasm this duet inspired was so great that it is somewhat baffling. According to Da Ponte's memoirs, the piece "seemed to electrify the audience and fill them with a kind of heavenly fire"; moreover, the Emperor himself "was the first to demand an encore, breaking a rule which he had made a few days earlier forbidding ensembles to be encored."[36] No doubt Da Ponte is being somewhat self-serving; but he had no particular reason to single out this duet rather than some other piece. The singer Michael Kelly later used the duet, with new English words, in a play staged in London. He wrote years later that the piece "became all the rage all over Ireland, England, and Scotland

[33] This point could be discussed at great length; as two examples among many, see the moment when the first violins switch from pizzicato to arco (m. 32), and the passage in mm. 36–38 when the solo woodwinds share in turn a new rising line of 16th-notes.

[34] The other lyric aria for Lilla, "Consola le pene" in Act II, is in 𝄢 but is otherwise remarkably similar to "Dolce mi parve un dì" in style and tone. It too relies on lightly accompanied vocal phrases with affecting silences between them, while the central section of its ABA form features the accompanying parts somewhat more prominently.

[35] See for instance mm. 12–14 and 26–28 of Lilla's "Consola le pene." This feature is also noted by Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," p. 143–44.

[36] Da Ponte, *Memorie,* I, 127; quoted by Hodges, *Lorenzo Da Ponte,* p. 77.

for many, many years."[37] Even more striking are the comments in the diary of Count Zinzendorf, an experienced and somewhat jaded observer of Vienna's operatic scene. They reveal that his feelings about the duet grew from pleasure on an initial hearing to something far stronger. "The duo between Mandini and Lilla in the second act is charming." (20 November 1786) "The pretty duo between Mandini and Storace was repeated; it is very voluptuous. I left disturbed." (4 December 1786) "I find the duo between Mandini and Storace so tender and so expressive that it poses a danger to the young members of the audience. One needs to have had some experience in order to see it with a cool head." (7 January 1787)[38]

Such remarks hardly seem to fit the duet in question, a piece whose short and regular melodic phrases are supported by a restrained accompaniment that employs relentlessly simple diatonic harmonies (Example 3).[39] In part, no doubt, eighteenth-century listeners were charmed by the interplay of measures 9–16, in which the lovers complete one another's phrases, all rocking gently above a dominant pedal; but overall there seems little here to explain the extreme response that the piece produced in its audiences.

The duet thus can serve as a valuable reminder of how much our own aesthetic responses seem to differ from those of Martín's, and Mozart's, contemporaries. It is surely true, as Downs puts it, that in comparison to Mozart "the Viennese audience could appreciate Martín's work at first hearing because it did not challenge them";[40] but to say this is not to explain why a piece like "Pace, caro mio sposo" was not only appreciated but found to be disturbingly erotic. The Viennese response suggests a greater sensitivity to the expressive possibilities of diatonic progressions and of simple vocal textures like parallel thirds than audiences possess today. Indeed, given our wide exposure to music of much greater textural complexity and a far wider range of harmonic progressions, it is inevitable that in terms of late eighteenth-century music our ears should be somewhat "coarsened."

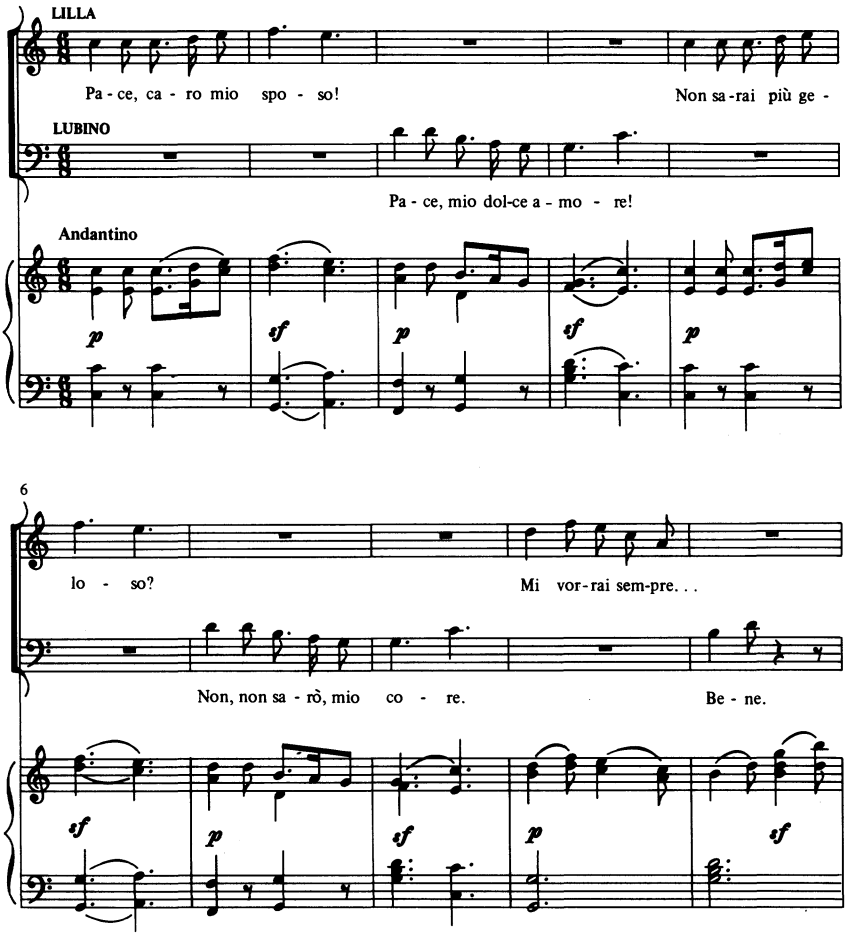
[37] Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences* (London, 1820; reprint ed., London, 1969), p. 187; quoted by Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," p. 39.

[38] Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater*, p. 405 n. 66; the translations are adapted from Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," p. 39. Zinzendorf also reported that at Nancy Storace's benefit concert on 23 February 1787, the duet was repeated three times; see Michtner, p. 406 n. 8.

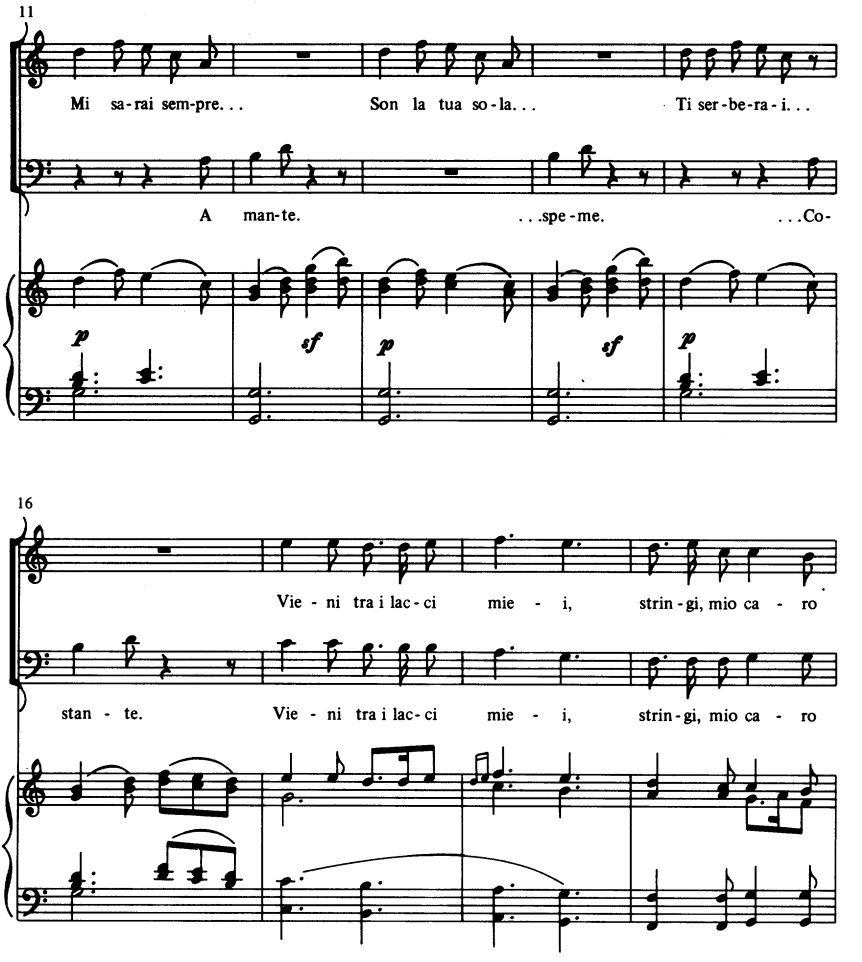
[39] After the 24 mm. of the example the duet repeats the same passage but with Lubino leading, after which there are two brief cadential extensions and an orchestral cadence that includes Martín's inappropriate dotted rhythms. Originally, as discussed below, this duet had a second section in $\frac{3}{8}$, which must have been cut soon after the opera's first performances.

[40] Downs, *Classical Music*, p. 531.

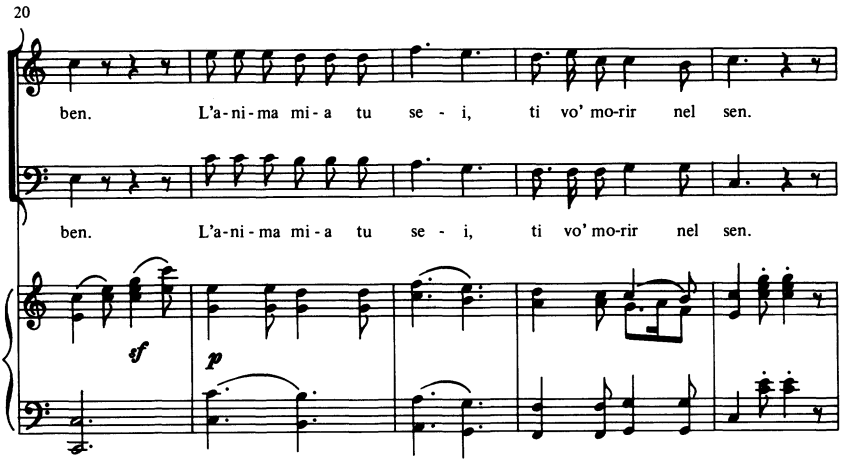
EXAMPLE 3. Duet, Act II No. 15, mm. 1–24.



EXAMPLE 3. *(continued)*



EXAMPLE 3. *(continued)*



The musical examples presented above may suggest that *Una cosa rara* depends entirely on what Edward J. Dent called "amiable melodies in $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythm that recall *Here we go round the mulberry bush.*"[41] Actually the thirty numbers of the opera include eleven pieces (or sections of larger pieces like finales) that use $\frac{6}{8}$: more than the seven examples in *Figaro* or the six in *Don Giovanni,* but not an extraordinary number, given the pastoral flavor of the story. As Roy Jesson points out these pieces "are specifically associated with the 'rustics'—the huntsmen and the *serrani* of the village."[42] Nor do all of these fall into the typical rhythms of a $\frac{6}{8}$ meter. The Prince's serenade (Act II, No. 12; reprised as No. 13) displays a strikingly Spanish flavor with its syncopations, as does the Seguidilla (in $\frac{3}{4}$) of the Act II finale. This finale also features a waltz, which apparently became so popular during the run of the opera that the finale was altered to end with a reprise of the waltz melody. In general "Martín commands a wide variety of rhythmic idioms and has an unfailing sense of theatrical timing in employing them."[43] The arias for the noble and peasant characters alike reveal the same sensitivity to the socially-appropriate

[41] Dent, *Mozart's Operas,* p. 104.

[42] Roy Jesson, "Una cosa rara," *Musical Times* CIX (1968), 620. Though as noted earlier, one of these numbers, while it is addressed to the villagers, is sung by the Queen. She does likewise in the opening section of the Act II finale.

[43] Ibid.

dance- or march-type that Wye Jamison Allanbrook documents in Mozart's opere buffe.[44] And when a darker tone is needed—which is rarely in this rather sunny and untroubled opera—Martín supplies it, though as suggested above he cannot match Mozart's intensity. The opening C-minor chorus of the introduzione, in which the villagers fear for the safety of the Queen on the hunt, is reminiscent of the chorus of shipwrecked sailors in Mozart's *Idomeneo,* especially in the antiphonal cries from two groups of singers.[45] And Lubino's extended rage aria in Act I (No. 9), following an equally lengthy accompanied recitative, contains a wonderfully foreboding central passage in C minor (the aria is in E-flat), as well as an effective buildup to its furious final cadences.

The latter aria also presents one of a number of tantalizing brief resemblances to *Figaro,* moments whose recognition becomes one of the pleasures of exploring *Una cosa rara.* Here a pair of two-measure phrases seem to have been borrowed straight from Figaro's Act IV aria, "Aprite un po' quegl'occhi" (compare Examples 4 and 5). The two arias are in the same key, and the common phrases occur at virtually the same point: at or just after the beginning of the music in the dominant in the exposition.[46] Among a number of striking similarities I have noticed (and others will surely find more) I will cite just two others, both of them correspondences between the central finales of *Una cosa rara* and *Figaro.* The first is textual: Lubino's jealous and angry rebuke to Lilla, "La Lilla non è quella,/Lubin io più non sono," reminds us of the Countess's angry rejoinder to her pleading husband at a comparable moment: to his "Rosina!" she replies, "Crudele! più quella non sono."[47] Likewise, the justly-celebrated passage in which Susanna emerges from the closet to the shock of the Count and Countess finds its echo in Lilla's appearance from a closet, to general stupefaction. Mozart's shock tutti centers on a moment of true suspended animation, played out in a slow alternation of I and vii chords in B-flat above a B-flat pedal (mm. 145–155). In the last two measures

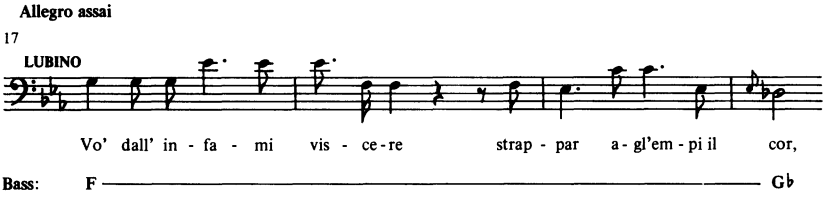
[44] Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: "Le nozze di Figaro" and "Don Giovanni"* (Chicago, 1983).

[45] The chorus in *Idomeneo* is Act I, No. 5. *Idomeneo* was presented in a concert version at the palace of Prince Auersperg on 13 March 1786 (see Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater,* pp. 206–07); Martín was almost surely in Vienna at the time, and could have heard the performance. But the resemblance between these two choruses is not so striking as to call for the conclusion that Martín must have heard Mozart's opera.

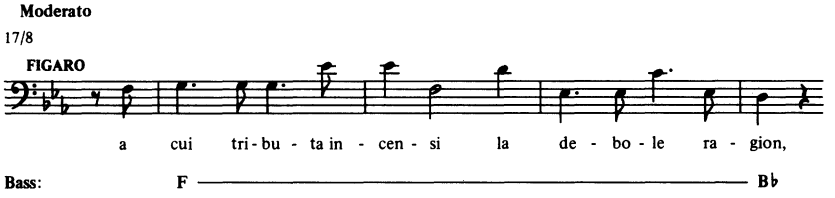
[46] However, finding virtually the same idea in Pasquariello's "Catalogue aria" from Bertati and Gazzaniga's *Don Giovanni* of 1787 (mm. 26–29) provides a cautionary reminder that some resemblances may just reflect the common coin of the style, rather than the results of direct influence.

[47] Musically, both passages feature sudden and dramatic shifts to the relative minor of the local tonic, though they are accomplished in different ways.

EXAMPLE 4. Aria, Act I No. 9, mm. 17–20.



EXAMPLE 5. Mozart and Da Ponte: *Le nozze di Figaro,* Aria, Act IV No. 26, mm. 17–21.



of this passage the bass drops to G (for a vii^{6}/V) and then to F (V), quietly breaking the spell. At the moment of Lilla's appearance precisely the same harmonic progression occurs, in the same key (mm. 325–331): an alternation of I and vii over a tonic pedal, and then a descent of the bass via G to the dominant. This moment in *Una cosa rara* rings in the ear like a borrowing from Mozart, despite the important difference: Martín never slows down. The passage sails by in an Allegro in common time, the composer declining the opportunity to create a moment of repose like Mozart's.[48] In all probability this is because the finale thus far has already had two such moments, in response to other sudden appearances or revelations. One or two shock tuttis in a finale was about the norm; three would surely have been excessive.[49]

[48] Nor does Martín copy one of the most original features of Mozart's (and Da Ponte's) scene: the fact that the Count and Countess are given the opportunity to react right away to Susanna's appearance, rather than waiting for several measures while she sings. The scene from *Figaro* is considered in greater detail in Platoff, "How original was Mozart?", 113–16.

[49] For a discussion of the shock tutti and its role in the opera buffa finale of the 1780s see John Platoff, "Musical and Dramatic Structure in the Opera Buffa Finale," *Journal of Musicology* VII (1989), 219–22.

In its structure *Una cosa rara* is for the most part a typical number opera of the late eighteenth century: its arias and ensembles, separated by recitatives, occur in response to the needs of the story, without any apparent attempt to create long-term tonal or thematic relationships between them. Yet this is not quite the whole story, for Martín does create larger relationships at two points. The first is relatively straightforward: both the opening theme and a striking coda theme from the overture (mm. 143–58) are heard again in the last finale. A single statement of the eight-measure opening theme (Example 1 above) begins the finale, while the lively theme from the coda is heard several times in the initial section of the finale, and used again for the final section, where it depicts the exit of the Queen and her retinue. (This latter reprise was actually abandoned when the Act II finale was revised, as discussed below.) More ambitious and unusual is Martín's attempt to create continuity through the entire first scene of the opera (actually four scenes in the libretto, where each new entrance of a character is marked by a new scene), encompassing the overture and first four numbers. He accomplishes this by eliding or connecting numbers, by minimizing the simple recitative in the scene, and by a return of musical material.

To begin, the overture in C proceeds *attacca* into the introduzione, a chorus in C minor. The end of the chorus is in turn linked to the Queen's entrance: an accompanied recitative and brief solo melody elided to another chorus (in C, this time a song of gratitude for her safety). The first fully closed cadence of the opera is heard only at this point. A very short simple recitative (12 mm.) sets up No. 2, a trio whose key of C can be heard to be the same as that of the preceding chorus. And a bit later, after more simple recitative and Lilla's short cavatina in F minor,[50] the Queen sings a cavatina in F (preceded and followed by accompanied recitative) that is linked to a reprise of the chorus of gratitude in C, thus rounding off the scene. There are thus two levels of musical continuity: first, the overture and multi-sectional introduzione are elided and proceed without a closing cadence until after the second chorus. Second, the rest of the opening scene is concluded (after another number in C and two in F minor and major) by a return of that same chorus.

Such procedures are not unheard of in Viennese opera buffa—Mozart's structuring of the opening scene of *Don Giovanni* (written the following year) is similar in many ways—but they are unusual. Some of the impetus was clearly provided by Da Ponte, whose libretto calls

[50] This piece and its relationship to Don Alfonso's "Vorrei dir, e cor non ho" from *Così fan tutte* are discussed in Platoff, "How original was Mozart?", 107–08.

for repetition of the chorus, but the other decisions had to have been made by Martín himself. And the creation of this continuity in the opening scene represents one of two significant innovations in *Una cosa rara,* the other being the use of vocal canons.

Actually the "canons" that Martín introduced to Viennese opera buffa are really three-part "rounds based on periodic phrase structure. The melody is divided into phrases of equal length and the successive entries of the voices coincide with the beginnings of the phrases."[51] Such pieces occur twice in *Una cosa rara,* both times in trios (Act I, Nos. 2 and 12), and appear later in Martín's next opera, *L'arbore di Diana* (1787), as well as in Salieri's *La cifra* (1789) and Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (1790). That canons of this sort were popular in Vienna is demonstrated not only by these examples in operatic music, but by a number of publications of vocal canons for domestic use, by Martín and others.[52] Despite their use of imitative entries the pieces lack rhythmic independence between their phrases, and thus have little of the effect of true polyphony. As Link points out, their attraction lies not in contrapuntal ingenuity but "in the purely sensuous appeal of shifting colour combinations produced by the voices exchanging parts."[53] This is evident especially in Act I, No. 12 from *Una cosa rara,* where the canon is little more than another example of Martín's song-style. His aim, here as so often elsewhere in the opera, is to achieve graceful melodic writing with sweet and uncomplicated harmonies.

It would be easy to evaluate Martín's music in *Una cosa rara* simply as "less good Mozart," but the impulse should be resisted. Just as Schubert has sometimes suffered from being judged in Beethovenian terms and found to be a less good Beethoven, so Martín y Soler is not Mozart's equal on Mozart's terms. Indeed there is no other opera composer of the eighteenth century who could stand up to such a comparison. Instead we must evaluate Martín by his own standards, and acknowledge that *Una cosa rara* is a very beautiful opera. It is full of unusually attractive melodies, delicate and imaginative scoring, and more stylistic variety than perhaps I have been able to suggest, with considerable humor as well as grand arias for the elevated characters. Not only its lyrical moments but some of the more active numbers, such as the Act I finale, are first-rate. It is not that Martín fails to

[51] Dorothea Link, "The Viennese Operatic Canon and Mozart's 'Così fan tutte' ", *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozart* XXXVIII (1990), 112.

[52] Idem., " '*E la fede degli amanti*' and the Viennese Operatic Canon," paper presented at the National Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Montreal, November 6, 1993.

[53] Idem., "The Viennese Operatic Canon and Mozart's *Così,*" 114.

achieve Mozart's dramatic intensity and musical complexity; his goals lie in other directions. In fact, even in their own day Mozart was understood to be a composer for the "Kenner," the knowledgeable and sophisticated musical audience, while Martín's appeal was to the "Liebhaber," the far broader ranks of the musical amateurs.[54] This latter appeal was uniquely successful; in the last half of the 1780s there was no other opera composer whose popularity in Vienna came close to matching that of Martín y Soler.[55]

The beginnings of a new history

In the last decade or so *Una cosa rara* seems once again to be acquiring a history. This is indicated by several recent productions of the work,[56] by the 1991 recording of one of these productions, and above all by the publication of the score in Henle's prestigious series *Die Oper*. The series, which has included works such as Antonio Salieri's *Tarare* and Francesco Gasparini's *Il Bajazet,* aims to publish "critical editions of masterpieces of operatic history." The editors of the series stress in their general foreword their adherence to "rigorous text-critical standards"; moreover they assert that variants and alternative versions whose authenticity can be established will be included with the score volume in an appendix. Finally, they state that the Critical Report will supply the necessary information for an assessment of the basis of the text given in the score volume (p. v).

Regrettably, on all three counts the present edition fails to live up to its series editors' claims. The score's text is not taken from the musical sources with the best claim to authenticity; several authentic variants of considerable importance, including alternate arias and a different conclusion to the Act II finale, are neither included nor even mentioned; and Gerhard Allroggen's foreword to the volume declares that no Critical Report is needed or will be published.

[54] This view of Mozart and Martín and their audiences is discussed in some detail in Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," pp. 195–99.

[55] Between 1785 and 1792 Martín's *L'arbore di Diana* and *Una cosa rara* were the two most-performed operas at the Burgtheater, with 65 and 55 performances respectively. Only one other opera, Salieri's *Axur,* achieved as many as 50 performances in this period (*Figaro* had 38 performances, *Don Giovanni* 15). These figures are drawn from Michtner, *Das alte Burgtheater,* pp. 480–511. For an assessment of Mozart's standing among his Viennese operatic contemporaries throughout the 1780s see John Platoff, "Mozart and His Rivals: Opera in Vienna," *Current Musicology* LI (1993), 105–11.

[56] Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," pp. 320–30, lists six productions in the years 1966–86. To this may be added Savall's 1991 performances in Barcelona and a 1993 production in Drottningholm, Sweden.

Before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of this unhappy situation, I hasten to reassure the potential user that the edition is still of great value—it is wonderful simply to have *Una cosa rara* finally accessible for study. The volume is spacious and handsomely laid-out, with a clear typeface for both music and text. Included at the back is a German prose translation of the libretto. The music seems to have been carefully proofread; I detected only one error of any consequence.[57] And the volume contains plausible, if not always entirely authentic, readings of most of the music heard at the first performances of the opera in November 1786.[58] In short this edition can serve both as the basis for performances of *Una cosa rara* and for a study of its music.

That said, the textual basis of the edition and the resulting errors and omissions are indeed disheartening. As Allroggen's foreword points out, *Una cosa rara* survives in a large number of manuscript copies, both complete and incomplete, all over Europe, as well as printed piano-vocal scores and numerous manuscript copies of individual numbers.[59] But, in the absence of any known autograph score, Allroggen asserts quite correctly that the most authentic copies are those stemming from the workshop of the Viennese court copyist, Wenzel Sukowaty. Allroggen chose two manuscript scores in Brussels as his principal sources, since both can from their title-pages be unquestionably associated with Sukowaty's shop. (This choice, however, is not mentioned in the foreword.[60]) His comparisons to a number of other manuscripts found that their readings followed those of the Brussels scores completely, with the exception of two small "Leitfehlern" (which he discusses): one alternate aria for the Prince in a Dresden manuscript (this aria is given in the Appendix), and a small variant in the ending of a recitative. He therefore considered the whole group of manuscripts to reflect the version of the autograph as it existed in 1786;[61] from this perspective the source situation seemed uncomplicated and required no separate Critical Report.

[57] In the final 2 mm. of Act II, No. 13 the flute and oboe enter a measure late; in Act II, No. 12, which presents the same music, the passage is given correctly. There are also some wrong pitches in the edition, but in most cases the correct pitch is immediately obvious.

[58] Though it is noteworthy that the recorded performance directed by Jordi Savall, while it cites the Henle edition, diverges from it at several points, as discussed below.

[59] The following discussion is drawn from pp. viii–x.

[60] I am most grateful to Professor Allroggen for graciously replying to several of my questions about source matters and the basis of the edition.

[61] Again, this is not explicit in the foreword but was communicated to me by Prof. Allroggen.

The true source situation is considerably more involved. There are two manuscript scores in the Musiksammlung of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, where the musical material from the Burgtheater and Kärntnertortheater has been preserved. One of these scores, call number 17.794, is a clean copy; the other, KT 99, is a working copy obviously used as the basis for performances of the opera over a number of years, as it contains many layers of cuts and changes. What is crucial, however, is that the two Viennese scores contain different versions of some pieces and in some cases alternate pieces from the Henle edition—and both these scores are without doubt authentic Sukowaty copies from c. 1786. Though they lack Sukowaty's name on the title-page, such identification would not have been expected on a score prepared for Viennese use (as opposed to one sent abroad). More important, a recent examination by Dexter Edge of both the papers and the copyists' hands in the two manuscripts confirms my own view that they were produced by the Sukowaty firm. "There is no doubt that both KT 99 and 17794 were copied in the Sukowaty shop. . . . The constellation of hands in both scores matches quite closely that of other Sukowaty scores produced in 1786. The oldest level of KT 99, which accounts for most of the manuscript, is undoubtedly the original performance score of the opera." Edge believes 17.794 may have been copied slightly later than KT 99, which he thinks was not only a performance score but was used as the master for commercial copies produced by Sukowaty.[62] Examination of many other operatic manuscripts in the same library by both Edge and myself confirms that KT scores were performance scores, often with many layers of changes, while 17.000 scores were almost invariably clean copies. Edge suspects that many of the latter may have been copied for the Emperor's own collection.

This picture is made more complex by the existence of three early librettos published in Vienna: the first, dated 1786, presumably appeared at the time of the première; the second, dated 1787, is a German prose translation "produced to accompany the (Italian) performances in the Burgtheater"; and the third was printed in 1787 for the Prague production in the fall of that year.[63] We must also note three printed piano-vocal editions, the first of which has a strong

[62] Dexter Edge, personal communications of October 1, 1992 and January 12, 1994. I am deeply grateful to Mr. Edge, who has prepared an extensive catalogue of Viennese copyists' hands, for taking the time to examine the manuscripts at my request.

[63] My information about the German libretto and about the published vocal scores cited below comes from Link, "The Da Ponte Operas," especially pp. 70–74, where more details may be found (the quotation is from pp. 70–71). She also includes on pp. 295–99 a concordance of the principal sources for *Una cosa rara*.

claim to authenticity: the two-part publication of "Raccolta d'arie" from the opera, published by Artaria on 16 December 1786 and 21 February 1787, as mentioned above. While a detailed explanation of the relationship among these sources and their variants is far beyond the scope of this essay, let me outline briefly three examples (among a larger number that might be cited) to illustrate the difficulties with the Henle edition.[64]

Act II, No. 2 in the edition is an aria for Ghita, "Colla flemma". The edition neither gives nor cites any alternatives to this piece, which is found in 17.794 and in the 1786 Vienna libretto. But an alternate aria, entitled "Cavatevi padrona," clearly stems from the early days of *Una cosa rara*'s run. It is found not only in KT 99 (along with "Colla flemma," which is marked "Passa"), but in the two 1787 librettos and the Artaria edition. The replacement aria was thus part of *Una cosa rara* by no later than February 1787; there is no particular reason to doubt that Da Ponte and Martín created it, and it should certainly be accounted for in any critical edition of the opera.

As discussed earlier, the love duet "Pace, caro mio sposo" for Lilla and Lubino (Act II, No. 15) was the single great hit of the score. In its earliest form (transmitted by 17.794 and the first libretto) the piece comprised two parts with different texts: a 𝄵 Andantino sostenuto of 51 measures and a second section, 𝄵 Allegro assai, of 54 measures. But the later sources—the two 1787 librettos, the Artaria print, and the later layers of KT 99—all cut the 𝄵 section, leaving only the 𝄵 section with a tacked-on final cadence. In this case the Henle score presents the later version, again with no mention of the original two-part form of the duet, though embarrassingly the German translation of the libretto includes the text for both sections (p. 460).

The Act II finale of the opera also underwent changes fairly early in its run. In its original form (found in 17.794 and the first libretto) the finale closed with a 𝄵 movement that reprised music first heard in the coda of the overture and then in an early section of the finale (as noted above). But soon after the first performance the finale was altered so that it concluded with a repetition of a different tune from earlier in the finale: the 𝄵 Allegretto "waltz" melody "Viva, viva la Regina" (mm. 226ff), which was also an audience favorite. This musical change may be detected in librettos as well as scores, since the poetry at the end of the finale had to be changed to accommodate the musical change. The altered ending occurs in KT 99, the two 1787 librettos, and presumably in the scores consulted by Allroggen, since

[64] The source information in the following paragraphs is drawn in part from ibid., pp. 295–99, and in part from my own research.

it is the version printed in the Henle score. But once again no mention is made of the original ending, even though it has been noted in the literature.[65]

Despite the considerable merits of this handsomely produced volume, then, it does not represent a satisfactory critical edition of Da Ponte and Martín's opera. Fortunately, it would by no means be impossible for Henle to make it one. Clearly a full critical analysis of all the relevant sources is needed, but the resulting changes in the musical score could for the most part be accommodated in an expanded appendix. Necessary alterations to most of the numbers already printed are likely to be confined to adding measures cut from later sources, rather than more wholesale changes.[66] And, as I hope by now will go without saying, a complete Critical Report is called for as well.[67] But with these added labors a revised and corrected version of this edition could be produced that would live up to the rigorous standards of textual accuracy called for by the editors of the series.

The recorded performance of *Una cosa rara* is in large part delightful, and it stands up well to repeated listenings. Jordi Savall conducted the 1991 production at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona from which the recording was made; and any regret one feels at having missed the performances themselves—they were clearly quite lavish, with lovely costumes, as is clear both from reviews of the production and from the pictures in the booklet accompanying the recording—is at least partly mitigated by the quality of the performance recorded here. Savall's orchestra of period instruments, Le Concert des Nations, plays accurately and stylishly, and both his tempos and the "weight" of his interpretation are very nicely judged. And the singers, presumably with Savall's encouragement, provide a number of improvisatory-sounding lead-ins and embellishments at the places where modern scholarship suggests they are called for. (To be completely honest, some of these do not sound stylistically appropriate, but the attempt is nonetheless to be valued.) While everyone sings musically, the male singers are more consistently satisfying. The best

[65] Jesson, "Una cosa rara," 620.

[66] To give one example of what I mean: Ghita's alternate aria "Cavatevi padrona" discussed above comprises 82 mm. in KT 99, but that does not include a lengthy cut in the piece that has been stitched down. Link cites the piece as being 52 mm. long, while the Simrock printed score gives a version fully 122 mm. long.

[67] A Critical Report is also needed to explain the meaning of the various typefaces used for markings in the score: "tutti," "sotto voce," "sul ponticello," etc. appear in typefaces of different size, some italicized, some boldface. Presumably these reflect the distinctions between markings found in the sources and editorial additions, but at present the different typefaces are merely mystifying.

of the women is Gloria Fabuel,[68] whose light voice perfectly suits Ghita's music. Queen Isabella, apparently sung by Maria Angeles Peters, is sometimes painfully flat; and Montserrat Figueras, who sings Lilla, has a dark, closed, and somewhat throaty sound that makes Lilla's arias less beautiful and clear than they need to be. Both the ensemble work and the singing of the chorus, La Capella Reial de Catalunya, are a pleasure to hear; and indeed many of the opera's most successful moments are in the ensembles, where the greater textural complexity of multiple voices combines well with Martín's lyric gifts.

In light of my earlier remarks about the problems with the Henle edition, it is striking to note that Savall (though the Henle edition is cited in the recording booklet) has clearly gone directly to primary sources in preparing his performing score. Among several examples of divergences between the score and the recording is the conclusion of the opera. As I noted above, Allroggen presents the revised ending of the Act II finale, without mentioning that it is a revision. Savall uses the original ending (found in 17.794) in which the opera closes with a reprise of a tune from the overture.

There is no doubt that the value of having a modern edition (and a good-quality modern recording) of so important an opera as *Una cosa rara* greatly outweighs the drawbacks of the edition itself. As scholars continue the project of placing Mozart's opere buffe in a well-defined musical context, a knowledge of the works against which Viennese audiences heard Mozart's is increasingly indispensable. Additionally, *Una cosa rara* is a work that deserves to be seen and heard; and the existence of the Henle score will make this task far easier.[69] Yet at the same time the Henle edition reveals, if only inadvertently, the enormous gap between the way we approach "masterpieces" and admittedly lesser works. In an edition of a work by Mozart or any other composer of his stature, it is quite inconceivable that such central sources as 17.794 and KT 99, the latter the working score of the opera housed in the city where the opera was written and first performed, could have been overlooked. Yet that is precisely what has occurred in this case, resulting in a score with so many problems that a revised edition is urgently needed. At the same time that we are

[68] Oddly enough the booklet for the recording, while listing the singers, never identifies which singer plays which role. In some cases one can make a guess from looking at the photographs, which give the names of the performers but not the characters.

[69] In addition to the 1991 Barcelona performances there has already been a 1993 Drottningholm production, as mentioned above.

grateful for the beginning of the "second history" of *Una cosa rara,* we note that its new history has begun a bit tentatively. But in a larger sense, there is a historical irony to be savored in this reversal of fortunes: if the 1786 triumph of Martín's opera came at the expense of *Le nozze di Figaro,* in the 1990s *Una cosa rara* finds its meaning and significance only in its relationship to the work it once so decisively overshadowed.

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